

she was slender, graceful and evidently quite tall, although she seemed to play among the towering giants



Suddenly She Stopped and Looked Up

that attended her stroll. Her hand went thrust deep into the pocket of a white duck suit. A glance revealed white shoes and thin ankles in blue. She wore no hat. Her hair was like spun gold, dark, wavy and shimmering in the subdued light.

Suddenly she stopped and looked up. He had a full view of her face as she gazed about as if startled by some unexpected, even alarming sound. For a second or two he held his breath, stunned by the amazing loveliness that was revealed to him. Then she discovered him standing there.

In a flash he realized that he was face to face with the stranger of the day before. He took two or three impulsive steps forward, his hand going to his hat—and then halted. Evidently his senses had deceived him. There was no smile in her eyes—and yet he could have sworn that it was there an instant before. Instead there was a level stare.

"I am sorry if I startled—" he began.

The figure of a man appeared as if discharged bodily from some magic tree-trunk, and stood directly in his path—a tall, rugged man in overalls was he, who held a spade in his hand and eyed him intently. Without another glance in his direction the first and more pleasing vision turned on her heel and continued her stroll, summing off to the right, her fair head once more bent in study, her look eloquently indifferent to the gaze that followed her.

"Who do you want to see?" inquired the man with the spade.

Before Barnes could reply a heavy voice beckoned him from behind. He whirled and saw O'Dowd approaching, but twenty yards away. The Irishman's face was aglow with pleasure.

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken in the shape of you," he cried, advancing with outstretched hand. "You've got the breadth of a dockhand in your shoulders and the trimness of a prize fighter in your waist."

They shook hands. "I fear I am trespassing," said Barnes. His glance went over his shoulder as he spoke. The man with the spade had been swallowed up by the earth! He could not have vanished more quickly in any other way. Off among the trees were intermittent flashes of blue and white.

"I am quite sure you are," said O'Dowd promptly but without a trace of unfriendliness in his manner. "Remembering him as I do, I can't help saying that Barnes is a bally old crank. Mind ye, I'll say it to his face—I often do, for the matter of that. Of course," he went on seriously, "he is a sick man, poor devil. You see I've known him for a dozen years and more, and he likes me, though God knows why, unless it may be that I once did his son a good turn in London."

"Sufficient excuse for repatriation, I should say," smiled Barnes.

"I introduced the lad to me only sister," said O'Dowd, "and she kept him happy for the next ten years. No doubt I also provided Mr. Curtis with three grandchildren he might never have had but for my graciousness." A look of distress came into his merry eyes. "By Jove, I'd like nothing better than to ask you in to have a dish of tea—it's bedtime, I'm sure—but I'd no more think of doing it than I'd consider cutting off my head. He doesn't like strangers. He—"

"My dear fellow, don't distress yourself," cried Barnes heartily. "There isn't the least reason in the world."

"You see, the poor old chap asks me up here once or twice a year—that is to say, De Soto and me—to keep his sister from filling the house up with noise he can't endure. So long as we occupy the only available rooms, he argues, she can't stuff them full of objectionables. Twice a year she comes for a month, in the late fall and early spring."

"Why does he continue to live in this out-of-the-world spot? He is an old man, I take it, and ill."

"You wouldn't be wondering if you knew the man," said O'Dowd. "He is a scholar, a dreamer, a sufferer. He's not a very old man at that. Not more than sixty-five."

"He certainly has a fanciful streak in him, building a place like that," said Barnes, building a place like that," said Barnes.

(To be continued Tuesday)



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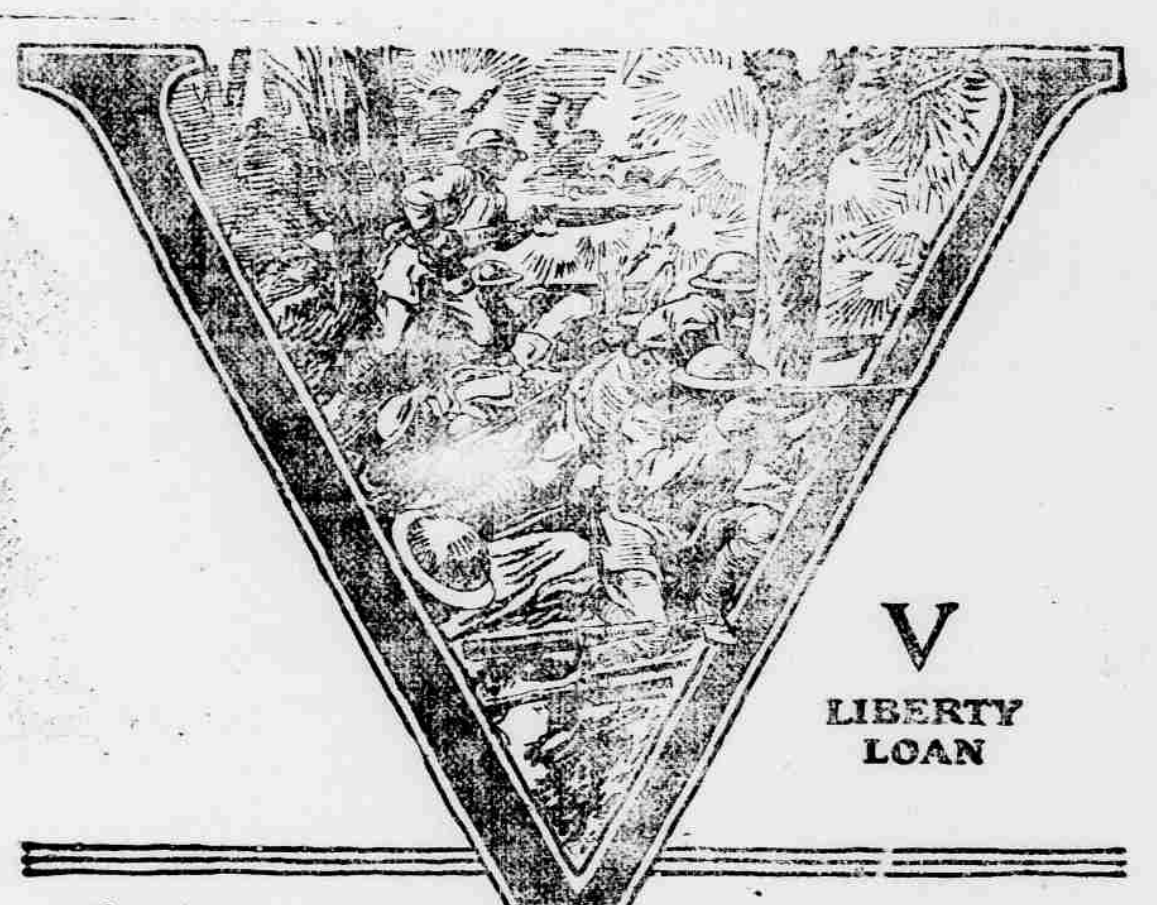
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